

VZCZCXR06314

PP RUEHC/HI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHGO #1170/01 3411155

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 071155Z DEC 07

FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6926

INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0758

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4305

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7849

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5409

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3417

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1204

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 001170

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STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM BM

SUBJECT: BURMA: WHO,S WHO IN THE REGIME

REF: A. USUN 1117

1B. RANGOON 1165

1C. RANGOON 1148

1D. RANGOON 640

1E. RANGOON 227

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (SBU) Summary. Despite persistent rumors of divisions within the Burmese military, we have not seen any evidence of exploitable schisms in the Than Shwe regime. While personality conflicts likely exist and some may be more moderate than others, so far no one has stepped up to challenge Than Shwe. This regime operates on personalities, relationships, and the opportunity for personal enrichment. Policy differences tend to take a back seat. In response to USUN 1117, we have prepared the following synopsis of who's who in Burma to pass to Gambari. End Summary.

The Insiders and Their Structure

12. (SBU) Than Shwe - On paper Burma is ruled by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and the cabinet. In reality, however, Than Shwe controls nearly everything. The Senior General, or "Number One" as he is often called, serves as both SPDC Chairman and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. As such, he wields ultimate authority over Burma's armed forces and serves as the head of state. Increasingly all decisions, even mundane ones, get passed to him to decide. He is aided by several others.

Maung Aye - Vice Senior General Maung Aye, or "Number Two" is both the SPDC Vice Chairman and Commander in Chief of the Army. He is rumored to oversee day-to-day affairs. He also controls the allocation of resources to the army, but does not wield operational command of the troops.

Thura Shwe Mann - Operational control of the armed forces rests with Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant General Thura Shwe Mann. When Than Shwe wants something done, Thura Shwe Mann usually conveys his orders to the army and enforces his will. While he is thought to be more open-minded, by all accounts he willingly participated in the brutal repression of September's pro-democracy protests.

Tin Aung Myint Oo - Lieutenant General Tin Aung Myint Oo has just been promoted to the powerful office of Secretary One of the SPDC. His duties are similar to that of a chief operating officer for the SPDC. Previously he was the quartermaster general and was awarded the honorary title of Thiha Thura (brave as a lion) for valor under fire and is a well-respected soldier.

Thein Sein - The post of prime minister, held by consummate insider Lieutenant General Thein Sein, is considered chiefly ceremonial and is not in the military's chain of command. However, this prime minister has the confidence of Than Shwe and is believed to be influential as a result. He is a patron of the pro-regime Union Solidarity Development Association and Than Shwe chose him as the Chairman of the National Convention.

Ye Myint - Lieutenant General Ye Myint is the Chief of Military Affairs Security (MAS), one of the two intelligence agencies created following former intelligence chief Khin Nyunt's ouster in 2006. During his tenure, Ye Myint has significantly strengthened MAS's authority and resources. He is a member of the SPDC and thought to be both a capable intelligence officer and a shrewd bureaucratic operator.

Myint Hlaing - Lieutenant General Myint Hlaing serves as Chief of Air Defense. He is known to be close to Maung Aye and has his confidence. While this post is not normally a powerful position, his duties keep him near the seat of power in Nay Pyi Taw and allow him to capitalize on his relationship with Maung Aye.

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¶3. (SBU) Below these men are a network six Bureau of Special Operations commanders and 13 regional commanders. These officers are charged with executing Than Shwe's orders, often enriching themselves in the process. Regional commanders serve as de facto governors of their regions and wield significant power over the local residents. Significant opportunities for graft exist and corruption abounds. Six Bureau of Special Operations (BSO) commanders supervise the regional commands. The BSOs do not have well-defined institutional powers. Instead much of their power derives from the personalities of the incumbents and their relationship to Than Shwe or Maung Aye. Regional commands are often seen as a stepping stone to higher office and several of the regime's top officers, including Maung Aye, Thein Sein, and Thura Shwe Mann, served as regional commanders before moving up.

Myint Swe - Lieutenant General Myint Swe is the BSO commander for Rangoon. He is the nephew of Than Shwe's wife and served as the Senior General's aide de camp earlier in his career. While he is not a member of the SPDC, his relationship with Than Shwe gives him influence. He wielded operational control over the recent September crackdown in Rangoon. Myint Swe exercises considerable power over the country's largest city earning him the nickname the "Viceroy of Rangoon."

Tin Ngwe - Brigadier General Tin Ngwe is the Regional Commander for the Central Command, which covers Mandalay. The Central Command is considered a prestigious posting, one normally staffed by a more experienced Major General. Tin Ngwe's elevation in November to that post from his previous position as Nay Pyi Taw's Regional Operations Commander was seen as a strong indication of his seniors' confidence in him.

RUMORED DISAGREEMENTS

¶4. (SBU) High office in Burma brings with it ample opportunities for graft and personal enrichment. Challenging Than Shwe risks losing not only power, but money. Those in

positions of power compete with each another for a bigger piece of the pie. Distrust of one another is an inherent part of life in the regime. At the same time, everyone has a vested interest in keeping the arrangement going and must strike uneasy alliances to do so. Everyone wants more but no one can go it alone. While the possibility of dissension is ever-present, so far, these pacts appear to have held.

¶15. (C) Persistent stories circulate about differences between Than Shwe and Maung Aye. Reportedly Than Shwe will only step down if Maung Aye does so at the same time, but Maung Aye wants his turn at the top. Than Shwe, according to most observers, prefers Thura Shwe Mann as his successor to protect Than Shwe's financial interests. Whatever differences exist between the two senior generals has not affected how they run the country. One close contact with good ties to the military regime recently told us both men authorized the use of deadly force to crackdown on the monks and described both as hardliners and "a lost cause" (Ref C).

¶16. (SBU) Chief of General Staff Thura Shwe Mann is often spoken of as a moderate, who has been reaching out beyond the military to develop a better understanding of the challenges facing Burma. He is also considered very corrupt due to the activities of his sons and resented by some generals senior to him in the army. Although he was rumored to have disagreed with September's crackdown, he still carried out Than Shwe and Maung Aye's wishes.

¶17. (SBU) We have also seen no evidence of rumored dissension among some of the regional commanders, including stories that several refused to use force against demonstrators. Some reports from Mandalay did indicate that troops there were less violent than their counterparts in Rangoon. Similarly, political activists in Mawlainmyaing told us the regional commander there did not use violence. Still, once the crackdown began on September 25, soldiers and police quickly

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and efficiently crushed protests throughout the country. While desertions have long plagued the poorly-supplied military, we have received no credible reports of mass desertions from the military since the crackdown. Our contacts in Karen state told us desertion rates along the Thai border have not increased significantly since the protests and noted that nearly all deserters were low-level soldiers fed up with poor conditions in the army, not political dissenters.

¶18. (SBU) Some Embassy contacts have told us that many regional commanders were supportive of the dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and pleased with the statement Gambari released on her behalf (Ref C). Nevertheless, none of them have spoken out in favor of genuine dialogue or otherwise challenged Than Shwe. Furthermore, many of our contacts comment that given the opportunities for personal enrichment, regional commanders only care about power and stability, not principle. This does not rule out the possibility they may someday see change as more in their interests than the status quo, but not yet.

¶19. (C) Labor Minister Aung Kyi, liaison to Aung San Suu Kyi, has often been mentioned as a voice of reason within the regime. We have seen nothing to indicate he is an insider or wields any influence over policy. Dr. Tin Myo Win, Aung San Suu Kyi's personal physician, said Aung Kyi told the NLD leader he had no authority and could only report back to his superiors. Dr. Tin Myo Win described him as a failed military officer, who was only selected because he had a good reputation with the UN (Ref B).

Comment

¶10. (C) Schisms within the regime based on the narrow self-interests of its leaders may well exist. Unfortunately

though, any rifts among the leadership have not resulted in anyone challenging the status quo. Aung San Suu Kyi is still detained, arrests continue, and the dialogue appears dead. We have been advised by many Burmese - both pro-democracy and others closer to the regime - that we can take advantage of the greed and opportunism in the upper ranks by singling out Than Shwe and Maung Aye as the primary obstacles to change. They clearly are. If they were pushed aside, absent an established succession, then competition among the would-be successors might increase the chances that the more open-minded would see it in their interests to align with pro-democracy supporters. We see no possibilities of change with Than Shwe and Maung Aye in charge, but some possibilities with them sidelined. So, making Than Shwe and Maung Aye the bad guys seems the best strategy in the current circumstances.

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